

**Congresswoman Linda T. Sánchez**  
**Remarks:**  
**“Media Bias And The Future of Freedom Of The Press”**  
**May 24, 2004**

You can't have a democracy if you don't have freedom of the press.

Democracy is all about people making decisions regarding their government. They can't make the right decisions without the right information. And it is the press that keeps the public informed about the actions, both bad and good, of the people's government.

Throughout history, the United States has fought governments – whether Communist, totalitarian or dictatorial regimes – that attempt to trample on the freedom of the press.

Unfortunately, we are starting to see an erosion of that very same freedom here in the United States. Many of our most longstanding news organizations have given in to pressure from the Administration. They have backed off of stories, or worse, refused to publish stories out of fear of government retaliation.

For example, Newsweek recently retracted a story it published about treatment of detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, that included possible desecration of the Koran. While the accuracy of the report was questionable, it was not as disturbing as the Administration's reaction to the story.

White House, State Department, and Pentagon officials sharply criticized Newsweek for publishing the story and demanded the retraction.

I'm all for journalistic integrity, but not at the cost of journalistic independence.

It is not the responsibility of the government to tell our news outlets what to report, how to report it, or when to report it. That is true of any news report, but is particularly important when the story is about the federal government.

After all, the same Administration that is influencing news reports in the United States is hypocritically promoting freedom of press and democracy in other countries.

Earlier this year, Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice went Russia and told Vladimir Putin that he needs to promote a free press as a part of fostering democracy.

She said, “It is important that Russia make clear to the world that it is intent on strengthening the rule of law, strengthening the role of the independent judiciary, permitting a free and independent press to flourish. These are all the basics of democracy.”

I strongly believe in those words and I wish President Bush's Administration did too.

It is ironic and troubling that our Administration is criticizing Russia, Iraq, and China for silencing the press, while at the same time eroding of freedom of the press and democracy here in the United States.

History has taught us time and again, that government influence of the press and silencing of the press coincide with the erosion of Democracy and the infringement of peoples' rights.

If we want to promote Democracy abroad, we need to start by protecting democracy at home.